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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION; VENEZUELAN-CUBAN CONFEDERATION; BRAZIL'S
SUPPORT FOR VENEZUELA'S ENTRY INTO MERCOSUR; US DEPUTY ASSISTANT
SECRETARY OF STATE JOHN NEGROPONTE TO PAKISTAN; LATIN AMERICAN

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MILITARY REARMAMENT; 11/19/07

1. SUMMARY STATEMENT

Weekend papers carry opinion pieces on an idea to create a Venezuelan-Cuban Confederation as a result of an amendment to the current Venezuelan constitution; Brazil's support for Venezuela's entry into Mercosur; implications of DAS John Negroponte's trip to Pakistan; and the military rearmament in Latin America.

2. OPINION PIECES AND EDITORIALS

- "Venezuelan-Cuban Confederation"

Daily-of-record "La Nacion" carries an op-ed piece by Emilio J. Cardenas, former Argentine Ambassador to the UN, who opines (11/19) "The decree submitted to the National Election Committee (which will pass an amendment to the Constitution of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) included a surprising last-minute amendment to Section 153 of the current Constitution which is directly related to the sensitive issue of sovereignty and seems to be aimed at making up a Confederation between Venezuela and Cuba. The proposal will now be submitted to popular referendum in early December.

"... The wording of the noted section was surreptitiously adopted... although it paves the way for hugegeopolitical decisions in the region. The Bolivarian 'bloc' is already acting in a concerted way on foreign policy issues, as shown by the joint action between Nicaragua and Venezuela in the Ibero-American Summit recently held in Santiago de Chile...

"... Some observers of the Venezuelan reality believe that the underlying idea is merge Cuba with Venezuela in a new confederation that will be open to the participation of other States, along the lines of the political union that Egypt and Syria attempted in the Middle East.

"... In spite of the surprise triggered by this, the truth is that there were some previous 'signs.' Hugo Chavez himself had used the word 'confederation' many times referring to the 'merging of both governments' during his October 12 trip to Cuba...

"A few days before, Cuban FM Felipe Perez Roque had asserted that his country is willing to cede its sovereignty and its flag to become part of a "greater motherland" that can guarantee the survival of the Communist regime on the island when Fidel Castro passes away. However, neither Raul Castro nor the military seem to be too excited with the idea of having to obey Hugo Chavez's omnipotent orders.

"All of sudden, a new political alternative seems to be appearing on the horizon for our region. Organizing this perhaps will not be as easy as Chavez may think. Nonetheless, what is clear enough is that its political consequences could well spread beyond the Caribbean."

- "Brazil redoubles its support for Chavez and wants Venezuela's entry into Mercosur"

Eleonora Gosman, Sao Paulo-based correspondent for leading "Clarín," writes (11/17) "The Brazilian Government supported Venezuela. FM Celso Amorim defended Venezuela's entry into Mercosur shortly after President Lula da Silva said that democracy reigns in Venezuela. The Brazilian FM believes that having Hugo Chavez inside is 'a priority for regional integration.' He stressed that if one wants South America to be at peace 'economic integration should be reinforced.' Itamaraty sources opined that Venezuela's entry into Mercosur will be the guarantee to keep Venezuela 'far from Iran.'"

"Amorim admitted that Brazil must pay 'a political price' for its position. Nevertheless, he emphasized that their support for Caracas is a small price compared to attempting to 'isolate' the Chavist government."

"... FM Amorim acknowledged that one of the costs to Mercosur could be more difficulty negotiating free trade deals with the US and the EU in the future. But this remains to be seen because, among other things, Chavez is believed to have established strong contacts with those who could win the 2008 US elections, that is, Democratic candidates. Regarding Europeans, there could be an increasing malaise at the possibility that they would have to negotiate with a five-country Mercosur that could include Venezuela."

- "The Pakistani dictator does not cede to the pressure of Bush's envoy"

Maria Laura Avignolo, on special assignment in Islamabad for leading "Clarín," writes (11/18) "Pakistani President General Pervez

Musharraf refused to lift the state of emergency as a response to the US Ambassador and number two at the Department of State, John Negroponte, 'until security is reestablished.' In a new step towards unpredictability in the Pakistani crisis, he closed two other TV channels and set up a 15,000-man military operation in Swat, where he faces a Taliban rebellion, with an army that does not want to fight and much less kill other Pakistanis.

"... Negroponte's idea of reconciliation between Benazir and Musharraf quickly became a vain illusion..."

"During an interview with the BBC, Musharraf called Benazir 'the West's darling.' After that, he conveyed a disconcerting message to the US - the risk that 'in a deeply disturbed climate,' Pakistani nuclear weapons 'could fall in the wrong hands.'"

"... Negroponte's mission is now sensitive and loaded with diplomacy in view of a furious Musharraf and opponents that threaten to join to overthrow him... Washington is beginning to reflect on elections and its "risks" as well as a transition government they believe could only last a few weeks."

- "Military rearmament in Southern Cone countries"

Leading "Clarín" editorializes (11/17) "Brazil has considerably increased its military budget..., which is in addition to Venezuela's increased armaments purchases. All this is happening in the context of a tendency among South American countries to reassess their defense infrastructure."

"The Lula administration's draft bill sets a military investment of 2.585 billion dollars in 2008 vis-à-vis 1.1 billion in 2007... Obviously enough, countries need to overhaul their armed forces... However, this should not mean a return to regional competition, balanced threats and the armed forces' interference in governments' political decisions."

"On the other hand, regional integration implies bigger integration between the armed forces in a framework of mutual confidence, balanced development of potentialities and participation in peace-keeping missions."

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